Even after the child was out, the pile of wood was still a drying womb to be treated carefully. It was also the wood for a consecrated fire. To drop a piece of this wood carelessly both injured and desecrated. If this happened a disease of the eyes "sang," came at once for which no male medical powers had any remedy. The only cure was in women's hands, that essence of maternity, "a drop of mother's milk--any mother's." The larger implications of this linking of fire and maternity are dealt with in the next section.

The Fire of Maturity

In the events surrounding the birth of the child, the significant step for the woman personally was the post-partum rest period by the fire (yū fai). Far more was at stake than just drying the uterus. The fire rest was one of the series of rites of the life-cycle which marked the course of an individual from birth to death. The others were the cutting of the umbilical cord, first head shaving, top-knot tonsure, ordination (for men), marriage, and cremation. Through the consecrated fire a woman formally achieved full maturity: she became suk (cooked, ripe, mature). Maturity did not come just by bearing a child. The fire brought about the transformation.[46]

How was mature womanhood viewed? What was the essential female role and office? Bang Chan saw a woman as one who "feeds and lengthens lives." As the custodian of growth she was, first, the guardian of the vital, essential khwan soul, and especially of the immature, flighty khwan of growing persons.

Secondly, a woman was a donor of nourishment (liang).[47] Her primary responsibility was to nurture children and other tender beings. She nourished the fetus with her blood. After

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46. "The fiery element digests what is eaten or drunk...and cooks the body and gives it its beauty of complexion. And the body thus cooked is kept free from decay" (Warren:157-158).

47. All the deities "concerned with the welfare of our bodies and our khwan" were maternal (Mae), e.g. Rice, Water, Earth, "Mother-Goddess" (Mae Sū), and several Mother-Princesses (Chao Mae). Fire, and maybe wind, were both female (mae) and male (phra) (Textor:485). To these deities, "higher" than ordinary spirits, Bang Chan "owed more."

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156 (riak khwan). Theirs was an augmented personal potency[55] in nurture not unlike the mana so widespread in the Asian-Pacific area.[56] The best midwives were liāng dī, though not all liāng
[059] dī were midwives. This societal peak was not an unattainable ideal. In the community, certain women were pointed out as liāng dī and some of them recognized in themselves the validity of this title.

562 The association of rice, motherhood, and khwan now stands
774 clear. Rice made suk by cooking over a fire, was the essential
776 food not only for the body but for the khwan. Growth and life
262 depended on the nourished khwan. Rice came from a maternal figure, the Rice Goddess, Mae Phōsop (cf. J.R. Hanks, 1960). Human mothers, too, when made suk, gave suk nourishment: the milk of the breast was merely transformed rice. Whenever rice was eaten throughout human adulthood, the Rice Mother continued her nourishment, for in each grain was a bit of her khwan, nourishing to the human khwan. The rice-bowl and ladle, used in many a ceremony, stood for the maternal care given a human khwan, and by extension, personal care throughout life. Whenever the rice bowl with offerings (khwan khāo: soul-[of]-rice)
[782] was presented by a parturient or by a sick person, loving care comparable to maternal care was being requested.

182 The idea of re-birth, of a fresh start within the pure area encircled by the holy cord, with auspicious words and
• 885 consecrated fire, was deep in every life-cycle rite. The
846 particular circumstance of the fire of parturition was a
562 forthright cooking to bring out and increase a woman's
372 essential femaleness, to transform her from a youthful, partial giver into a complete, mature donor of nourishment. Such was the satisfaction of women in this female role that many said they would like to be reborn as women. Few wanted

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55. Anuman Rajadhon (p. 134) reports that in India a newborn girl needed no ritual paraphernalia to keep away spirits because "her sex...is a protection in itself, and spirits cannot come to bother her." This was close to Bang Chan's idea of female potency.

56. Cf. "Mana" (E.R.E. VIII:375) for a quick run-down on a definition of mana.

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to be reborn as men. All women were eager to undergo the post-partum fire at least once. After that modifications might be entertained.[57] Whether the baby lived or died was not pertinent, for the benefits of the fire were for the mother.

Comparison of Male and Female Maturation Rites

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The parallel ritual that fitted men to perform their masculine role was ordination into the Buddhist priesthood. The well-documented Buddhist ends should not be permitted to eclipse this other personal goal. Just as the fire prepared a woman for motherhood, so ordination changed an immature youth into a man ready for marriage and fatherhood. He too was transformed from raw (dip) to ripe (suk). Men gained compassion through denial and suffering. Since their natures were seen as hard (khaeng), strong, bent on gain, influence, and power, possibly destructive and concupiscent, the severest deprivations were invoked: the renouncement of the gratifications of sex and food. Of the 2, the deprivation of food involved the greatest break with previous habits, for since babyhood, food had been a symbol of maternal care. Hence, a man was cast on his own. His only refuge and support was the Buddha, the law, and the Brotherhood. This self-denial induced the suffering that, coupled with knowledge gained from study of the scriptures, led to compassion. The suffering in no way

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57. The fire-rest though desirable was not obligatory. In 1865, Bradley said it could be "dispensed with in times of civil commotion, for fear of the enemy" and "no damages whatever were suffered whatever to mother or child" (p.79). Like other life cycle rites it was postponed if not convenient (gaduak). Also in times of peace, "a few mothers here and there cannot lie by the fire," and a few say, "they will not" (ibid:p.79). Bang Chan would accept this viewpoint freely as reflecting an individual, constitutional set of elements, or as an autonomous decision of an individual. The woman would never feel herself as competent as a ritually mature person though.

885 deprived a man of his masculine strength but was expected to
793 change him into a kind and merciful being.[58] It took at least
562 a three month season (phansā) in the priesthood to make a man
785 mature, responsible, and effective. That this moral fitness
[778] was not obtained overnight was given vivid illustration: if a
Buddha Amulet, designed for invulnerability, failed to be effective when tested by having a gun fired at it, it was "sometimes jokingly dismissed as a monk (phra) who has just been ordained (bùat mai)" (Textor:529). This interesting episode illuminates
789 one other important result achieved by both men and women in
885 their respective maturation rites: authorization to handle magic.

Magic and Maturity

In Bang Chan, magic was powerful. Whatever the purpose, whether beneficial or nefarious, it was effective if all conditions were met. Lest such power fall into unscrupulous hands, the community limited its availability and use to those who had gained the moral qualities and fitness to handle it wisely. Only the ritually mature could be counted on to be compassionate, strong, responsible adults, and so were permitted access to occult powers. Whether by ordination or the fire-rest, to be suk was an absolute prerequisite to magical knowledge. It did not give magical power, but qualified one to seek it out. Since no career in medicine was possible without magic, no man could be a mō who had not been previously ordained.

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562 The uses of magic by men had entirely different objectives from those of women. Their respective fields did not

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58. "A monk was changed...to be meek and mild." By seeking his morning alms he "show(s) mercy towards creatures" (prōt sat) (Anuman Rajadhon:76-77). Women's tenderness in their maternal function was not associated with shyness. A compassionate woman with a strong winyān soul (which projected the quality of the heart) was enterprising and effective (cf. J.R. Hanks, 1959). Where sexual characteristics were confused, instability in behavior appeared. The cultural expectation was that children and women were delicate (ōn), older people and men were hard (khaeng). "A male who is easily induced to convulse is one who had a 'soft' heart (chai ōn).[4] ...and also a 'soft' khwan (khwan ōn).....Such a young man is excitable rather than predictable and dependable, and hence is cause for parental anxiety" (Textor:485).

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The medium's powers as a mɔ̀ appeared to be entirely equivalent to a man's.

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To summarize, the fire-rest enabled a woman to acquire fruitful habits, new status, and the right to handle magic. The implications of the ritual clarified the role of women and the associated symbolism of rice, and by contrast the role of men. The nature of the magical resources available to each sex laid the groundwork for a career in midwifery for women, and for men, a career as a mɔ̀.

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Comparison of the respective rites of maturation points up certain contrasts and parallels between men and women. Women achieved compassion and maturity through their sexual role, while men achieved these qualities by denying their masculinity. Even a bounty of merit, which a man achieved directly by ordination, came to a woman through procreation, by the ordination of a son, or as a wife if her husband were ordained. Many activities were done by either sex, but each had certain exclusive proprietary areas. If women were donors of nourishment, men too had their donor roles, sexual, economic, religious, etc. Each paralleled the other in the formal steps to maturity, building the way for a complementary social and marital partnership for which both were ritually and psychologically well prepared.[62]

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62. In contrast, note the psychological ill-preparedness, leading to severe tensions in Ceylon (Obeyesekere, passim).

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friends to say positively that they cannot and will not endure it. For such, some other course has to be taken by the use of ...medicines" (p. 81).[74]

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The most noticeable modification in the customs of childbirth was the shortened fire-rest which had shifted from 29 or so days, to 9 to 15 or less; this was practiced by everyone.[75] Another conspicuous change adopted by a few dozen persons was the substitution for the open fire of a heat-making contrivance, in particular the hot-ashes or charcoal burning container (chamber or fire-box: fai chut) and the hot water bottle. (The hot brick and wrapped pot of hot salt were probably old alternatives.) New, of course, were the occasional utilization of the Minburi Health Center; the second class doctors; and, somewhat more generally, the novelties of the market, such as flowered net-frames, mits, shirts, pillowcases, and pacifiers. There were a few other changes noted.

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Who took up the innovations? First, they were women who had already successfully borne a child, undergone a full fire-rest, and were bearing their second or later children. Being already ritually mature (guk) and of proven competence in childbearing, they had no reason to fear a change and nothing to lose. Age and experience gave them the self-confidence, authority, and interest to ponder their experience and decide on ways to increase their effectiveness and their comfort. They had the right to do so because of the fundamental autonomy of the individual. Strong-minded old ladies might criticise the substitution of the hot-ashes container for the fire, feeling it was not hot enough to do the job, but they never questioned the woman's right to do so. The least likely to adopt

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74. On the other hand, Bradley (pp. 82-83) was puzzled why his success in saving the life of so revered a personage as the Queen by taking her off the fire, a move so thoroughly approved by the King, did not cause universal abandonment of the fire-rest. He was not aware that many a mɔ̄ did the same (with the possible exception of the sponging with tepid water), that as a mɔ̄-with-a-particular-specialty he could do anything he wanted but no one would copy it without personal formal authorization, and that he was up against the deeply-rooted rite of female maturation concerning which even royalty had no authority (Bangkok Calendar, 1871:107-109).

75. We have no data on whether this shortening process set in in the 1930's, or after World War II in the late 1940's. The month-long rest was universal in the 1920's.

178 a new way was a woman bearing her first child because she
184 was not yet ritually matured. This she wanted to be.
Moreover, her self-interest led her to try to profit as
312 much as possible from the experience of elders by first
846 following the old way. By incorporating the experience
•885 of successful child-bearers into her own and the baby's
life and by asking them to initiate actions auspiciously,
she augmented by that much her own competence, and laid
the groundwork for her future progress. Self-responsi-
bility engendered respect for elders. Thus there was no
split between old and young over innovations. Experience
gave grounds both for conservatism and for changing, but
at different age levels.

178 Secondly, changes were adopted by the rich who,
184 spending their money rather conspicuously, sought to main-
556 tain and enhance their social position. Their wealth
and position were in themselves unquestioned as signs of
merit earned in another incarnation.

178 The changes being introduced to Bang Chan were of two
564 kinds: first the prestigeful, and second, those giving no
increment of esteem, i.e. idiosyncratic changes of taste
or convenience; or those reflecting individual circum-
stances. The prestigeful innovations were oriented to-
wards the use of market novelties, modern medical care,
urban standards of cleanliness and beauty, and other ways
termed "progressive" associated with the city of Bangkok,
cynosure of the eyes of the rich. These values were
leading certain families away from their original occupa-
tion of farming, into the fields of teaching, trading,
carpentering, cottage-industry, etc. Since these new
occupations brought in steady cash and large land holders,
too, had a good income, an association was found of
372 wealth, prestige, urban interests, and innovation. Com-
846 ment on the hot ashes container (fai chut) indicated that
178 it was a strong symbol of prestige and progress. To use
it was "to get away from ignorance and the old way of do-
ing things." It was "cleaner, not hot or ugly, and more
convenient." One teacher took it up after reading an
advertisement in the newspapers that described glowingly
its more efficient healing effect. On the other hand, one
woman abandoned the fai chut because "it was not hot
enough to rid her of stiff muscles," so she went back to
the use of the fire. "It is all right for rich Bangkok
ladies who want to avoid a scar, but it does not give
177 enough strength for a farmer." She had no urban preten-
178 sions. Also in this prestigeful aggregate, observed here
278 and there, were the market novelties mentioned above:
954 bed, mat, and mosquito net instead of the plank-bed; kits
of medicine from the Chinese pharmacist instead of the old